

## EXPLORING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EXPERIENCES IN HOUSEHOLDS RELYING SOLELY ON MINIMUM WAGE

### *EXPLORANDO AS EXPERIÊNCIAS ECONÔMICAS DAS MULHERES EM FAMÍLIAS QUE DEPENDEM EXCLUSIVAMENTE DO SALÁRIO MÍNIMO*

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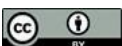
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**Abstract**

The minimum wage is a payment that paid to a person with the expectation that it will cover their basic needs, such as food, drink, housing, health, culture, and socialization, at a minimum level for a month. In developing countries, the proportion of workers earning the minimum wage has been higher compared to developed countries. More importantly, the disadvantages arising from being on a minimum wage can disproportionately affect women and men. The focus of this study is to investigate this unequal distribution, with a focus on women. To this end, the economic difficulties women experience within the household, in families where the sole earner is on a minimum wage, and thus where the only income is the minimum wage, have been examined. A semi-structured survey was applied to housewives in 100 families with these characteristics, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 of them. As a result of the study, in line with our hypothesis, it was found that in families where the sole earner receives the minimum wage, and thus the only income is the minimum wage, women are more negatively affected than men due to the low living standards associated with the minimum wage.

**Keywords:** Minimum Wage Families. Women and Poverty. Domestic Economy. Problems Faced by Women.

**Resumo**

*O salário mínimo é um pagamento feito a uma pessoa com a expectativa de que cubra suas necessidades básicas, como alimentação, moradia, saúde, cultura e socialização, em um nível mínimo por mês. Nos países em desenvolvimento, a proporção de trabalhadores que recebem o salário mínimo tem sido maior em comparação com os países desenvolvidos. Mais importante ainda, as desvantagens decorrentes do recebimento do salário mínimo podem afetar desproporcionalmente mulheres e homens. O foco deste estudo é investigar essa distribuição desigual, com ênfase nas mulheres. Para tanto, foram examinadas as dificuldades econômicas que as mulheres enfrentam dentro de casa, em famílias onde o único provedor recebe o salário mínimo e, portanto, onde a única renda é o salário mínimo. Um questionário semiestruturado foi aplicado a donas de casa em 100 famílias com essas características, e entrevistas em profundidade foram realizadas com 30 delas. Como resultado do estudo, em consonância com nossa hipótese, constatou-se que, em famílias onde o único provedor recebe o salário mínimo, e, portanto, a única renda é o salário mínimo, as mulheres são mais afetadas negativamente do que os homens devido ao baixo padrão de vida associado ao salário mínimo.*

**Palavras-chave:** Famílias Com Salário Mínimo. Mulheres e Pobreza. Economia Doméstica. Problemas Enfrentados pelas Mulheres.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Poverty has many dimensions and appearances. All around the world, poverty is increasingly becoming a characteristic of marginalized groups. In this sense, it can be easily said that poverty is rapidly affecting more women, the uneducated, rural populations, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and unskilled individuals. In every part of the world, women are disproportionately overrepresented among the total poor population. Numerous economic, social, and cultural factors converge and reinforce each other, leading to further impoverishment of a significant group of women and creating conditions of social exclusion for them. While the issue of gender inequality is increasingly being recognized and documented as a global trend, the prevalence, injustice, and individual and societal victimization caused by women's poverty have not been

adequately researched. The gender dimension of poverty has neither been seriously addressed in Turkey nor in the developing world, and the necessary policies to solve the female victimization caused by poverty have not been effectively implemented.

In the modern capitalist world, economic income is a crucial determinant not only for an individual's standard of living but also for their social prestige. Low income, as a distinct issue, affects individuals differently depending on their social context, with its economic, social, cultural, and psychological impacts varying between rural and urban areas. In cities, where market conditions and the money economy dominate, low-income individuals may experience these challenges more intensely than those in rural areas.

For women in low-income families, the impact of poverty is often more pronounced. Women typically bear the responsibility of providing daily meals and taking care of household needs, which means they face the direct consequences of limited income more frequently than men. When additional responsibilities, such as managing children's school-related and educational needs, are added, the effects of low wages on women are compounded. This study will focus on the economic and social difficulties faced by women in families that rely solely on minimum wage income.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW OF POVERTY AND WOMEN IN THE WORLD AND TÜRKİYE**

The “Feminization of poverty” became high profile in the early 90's. Several publications, one conference, and a movie on this topic were in circulation (Dooley, 1994, cited by: Curtis & Rybczynski, 2014). This topic has becoming more and more popular in academic fields too, since 90's.

Diana Pearce's seminal work *The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare* (1978) is widely recognized as the first to introduce the concept of the “feminization of poverty” into social science literature. Pearce highlighted that women in the United States experienced poverty at disproportionately higher rates than men, largely due to gender-based inequalities in the labor market, women's concentration in low-paid and insecure jobs, the economic vulnerability of single-mother households, and the structural biases of welfare policies that disadvantaged women. By demonstrating that poverty is not merely an economic condition but also a gendered phenomenon, Pearce

provided a critical theoretical foundation for subsequent feminist economics and for broader debates on gender and development.

The likelihood of women living in poverty is higher than that of men worldwide. Although this difference may vary by region and country, what is certain is that women are always and everywhere poorer. In the United States, the poverty threshold for a six-person family was calculated to be \$24,000 in 2014. According to this criterion, more than 16% of women in the United States (approximately 25.9 million women) live in poverty, while 13.4% of the male population is poor. The poverty rates are highest among Black women and American Indian & Alaska Native women, at 28.0% and 27.7%, respectively, followed by Hispanic women at 25.6%. Black, American Indian & Alaska Native, and Hispanic women are twice as likely to be poor compared to Asian American and white women. This ethnic and racial disparity in poverty has similar implications worldwide (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016).

As is well known, one of the primary determinants of poverty is education. The most reliable data on this issue comes from developed countries, making the figures from the United States particularly informative. In this country, 5.7% of women with a bachelor's degree or higher live in households with incomes below the federal poverty line, while 12.0% of women with some college education or an associate's degree, 16.9% of women with only a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 33.1% of women with less than a high school education live below the poverty line (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016).

Similarly, in the United States, poverty rates differ significantly by family type. Nearly 40% of families headed by single mothers live in poverty, compared to 22.0% of families headed by single fathers, and 8.2% of families headed by married couples with children. These figures provide clear evidence that, even in the most developed country, poverty disproportionately affects women more than men. Given the situation in the United States, it is possible to roughly estimate the relative poverty faced by women in progressively less developed and underdeveloped countries.

Oluwatayo (2014) reinforces the importance of applying a gendered lens to understand poverty, noting that women are often marginalized and lack access to essential resources. The author discusses the concept of the "feminization of poverty," emphasizing that women constitute a significant portion of the impoverished population,

especially in informal employment sectors. This highlights the need for targeted policies addressing the unique challenges women face in poverty.

Turkey, being a country located 97% in Asia, can be said to reflect more of the social and economic standards specific to this continent. Therefore, it may be more logical to initially research and discuss issues such as women and poverty in Turkey within the context of Asia. The Asian continent is known as the second poorest continent in the world after Africa. For this reason, it might be a valid approach to consider it as a continent where women are more heavily affected by poverty to a similar extent.

The literature examining poverty and its intersection with gender, particularly within Asian contexts, unveils a complex array of challenges and systemic inequalities that women face. A seminal contribution to this discourse is provided by Ani (2000), who underscores the nuanced relationship between women's socio-economic status and social justice. Ani argues that the benefits of development are often inequitably distributed, noting that in traditional societies, women may not automatically benefit from increases in household income. This foundational argument serves as a critical starting point for understanding the broader implications of gender-based disparities within economic frameworks.

Building on this, Oluwatayo (2014) introduces the concept of the “feminization of poverty,” emphasizing that women, particularly in rural and urban settings, are disproportionately affected by poverty. His analysis identifies systemic barriers in Nigeria, such as limited access to education and decision-making power, which further entrench the marginalization of women. This gendered approach to poverty provides a more nuanced understanding of the root causes and the varying conditions experienced by different groups of women.

Blizkovsky (2015) expands this discourse within the Asian context, focusing specifically on India. He observes a significant gender imbalance in poverty, particularly exacerbated by rural economic conditions. His findings suggest that while development aid has made strides in addressing gender disparities, the overall situation for women remains precarious, especially in rural areas, where they constitute a substantial portion of the poor. The connection between the “feminization of poverty” and the “feminization of agriculture” highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions in these sectors.

Vachya and Kamaiah (2015) further contribute to this dialogue by exploring the role of microfinance in economically empowering women. They argue that financial

empowerment can lead to improved family welfare and greater assertiveness concerning women's rights. Their study demonstrates that microfinance can be a transformative tool, enabling women to improve their economic standing and contribute meaningfully to poverty alleviation efforts.

In a comparative analysis, Voola (2016) examines the differing approaches to gendered poverty in India and Australia, with particular attention to how microfinance initiatives in India are designed to target women in order to address economic inequalities. This analysis reveals that while microfinance is positioned as a solution for women's empowerment, the measurement of its success is often limited to economic indicators, thereby overlooking broader dimensions of empowerment.

Asriani and Osira (2019) investigate the root causes of family poverty, linking gender inequality to suboptimal decision-making and resource management within households. They argue for the necessity of recognizing women's contributions to economic stability and the importance of empowering women to overcome patriarchal constraints.

Finally, Washizaki (2022) offers a systematic review of gender dynamics within the field of software engineering in Asia, which, while not directly addressing poverty, reflects broader societal trends of gender disparity in professional fields. This emphasizes the ongoing need for interdisciplinary approaches to address the multifaceted nature of both poverty and gender inequality.

In the Asian context, these studies illuminate the pervasive issue of poverty among women in Asian countries, highlighting the critical intersections of gender, economic opportunity, and social justice. The literature advocates for comprehensive strategies that not only address economic disparities but also empower women to challenge systemic inequalities and enhance their roles within their households and communities.

On the other side, the literature on poverty and women in Turkey reveals a complex interplay of socio-economic factors that disproportionately affect women's well-being and economic participation. A foundational work by Topal and Ozbilgin (2001) provides critical insights by demonstrating that women's participation in the labor market has significantly decreased, leading to greater economic dependency, particularly in older age. This decline is further exacerbated by a prolonged economic downturn and inadequate legislative support, resulting in considerable gender disparities in pension

entitlements. The authors argue that the migration of men from rural to urban areas in search of economic survival has left women more vulnerable and entrenched in poverty.

Building on this, Gundogan et al. (2005) offer a comparative analysis of the working poor, specifically focusing on women in urban contexts. Their findings indicate that women often work long hours but earn less than 30% of the minimum wage, with unemployment rates for women nearly twice those of men. This situation deepens the cycle of poverty, as women who exit the labor market due to unemployment are categorized as economically inactive, thus obscuring their struggles. The authors emphasize the necessity of stable economic growth and improved job quality to alleviate the conditions of the working poor, especially among women.

The barriers to education for girls in Turkey are critically examined by Gümüş and Gümüş (2013), who identify various obstacles hindering access to primary education, particularly in rural areas. Their analysis underscores how socio-economic factors, such as inadequate infrastructure and traditional gender norms, perpetuate educational inequalities that have long-term effects on women's economic empowerment.

Cakir and Ergul (2019) contribute to the discourse by exploring the relationship between economic growth and income inequality in Turkey. They argue that while economic growth is essential, it often does not benefit the poorest segments of society, including women. The authors stress the need for inclusive policies ensuring equitable access to education and healthcare, in order to address the underlying factors contributing to gender inequality.

Finally, Greulich and Dasré (2022) examine the relationship between women's economic participation and domestic violence in Turkey. Despite progress in women's education and employment, significant barriers persist. The authors highlight the continuing influence of conservative gender norms that restrict women's economic opportunities and reinforce traditional roles, particularly in the eastern regions of the country. They argue that legislative reforms aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace are insufficient without a broader cultural shift in attitudes toward women's roles in society.

From a conceptual perspective, it becomes clear that it is also necessary to address the closely related issues of patriarchy, social reproduction, relationality, and invisible labor. One of the first scholars in Turkey to produce academic work on this subject is Yıldız Ecevit (1990, 2007, 2010). Since the 1980s, Ecevit has approached the issue from

a leftist and feminist perspective, seeking to raise social awareness within academic circles. Her studies demonstrate, through fieldwork, that women's participation in working life is made extremely difficult by gendered roles, and even when women manage to participate, it does not alleviate their domestic workload.

Another important researcher on these topics is Dedeoğlu (2010). In this study, Dedeoğlu examines the impact of Turkey's export-oriented growth strategy, adopted since the 1980s economic liberalization, on women's labor. It is emphasized that in the garment industry, women are predominantly employed as "informal labor" in subcontracted or home-based piecework production. Through these organizational structures, production processes and workplace relations reproduce patriarchal ideologies. Women's subordinate positions are maintained through the social organization of production and the mobilization of kinship relations. Dedeoğlu highlights how this model incorporates invisible labor and social reproduction, underlining the ways in which women are marginalized as a secondary labor force within labor processes.

Other researches belong to Özşar and Yakut-Çakar (2013) on this topic and they examine the invisibility of women's labor in Turkey through the case of "women without men" (i.e., divorced, widowed, or never married women). The authors highlight how this group is marginalized both in domestic production and care work as well as in the labor market. Their study emphasizes that women are often pushed into informal and precarious jobs as survival strategies, while simultaneously bearing the full burden of household reproduction responsibilities. This reveals how the patriarchal family structure systematically renders women's labor invisible, while also showing that social policies remain inadequate in addressing women's vulnerable positions. The authors argue that the invisibility of women's labor is not only an economic issue but is also deeply intertwined with gender ideologies and institutional shortcomings.

Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges women face in Turkey, particularly in the context of poverty. The intersection of economic, educational, and social factors reveals a persistent cycle of disadvantage, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to promote gender equality and enhance the overall well-being of women in the country.

### **3 FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES**

Feminist political economy provides a crucial lens for understanding the structural dimensions of women's experiences in minimum wage households. Unlike conventional economic approaches, which tend to focus narrowly on income and market participation, feminist perspectives emphasize the centrality of unpaid domestic labor, social reproduction, and gendered hierarchies in shaping economic life (Bakker & Gill, 2003; Elson, 1999). From this perspective, women's contribution to household survival cannot be reduced to wage earnings alone but must also account for invisible labor, such as caregiving, household management, and emotional work, which sustains both the family and the broader economy (Folbre, 2001).

Within the gender-and-development framework, the intersection of patriarchal norms and economic structures becomes particularly evident. Scholars argue that women's labor is often undervalued, fragmented, and precarious, reflecting the dual pressures of market exploitation and domestic subordination (Pearson, 2000; Razavi, 2016). In the Turkish context, studies have shown that the feminization of labor—particularly in informal and low-wage sectors—reproduces inequalities by relegating women to secondary positions within both the labor market and the household (Dedeoğlu, 2010; Ecevit, 1991). This analytical lens makes it possible to connect women's household struggles in minimum wage families to broader dynamics of gendered poverty, social reproduction, and developmental inequality.

Thus, incorporating feminist political economy and gender-and-development theories allows this study not only to document the lived experiences of women in Trabzon but also to situate them within global debates about labor, gender, and justice. By grounding the analysis in these frameworks, the research highlights the systemic nature of women's economic marginalization and underscores the importance of policies that address both wage inequality and unpaid domestic work.

#### **4 WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE FAMILY, PATRIARCHY AND THE INVISIBILITY OF WOMEN'S LABOR**

The social perception of women, shaped within patriarchal structures, plays a defining role in their social status and participation in working life. Femininity is primarily associated with the household, where unpaid domestic labor constitutes a key site of women's subordination. As feminist scholarship emphasizes, such labor is rendered invisible, both ideologically and materially, because it does not produce lasting or exchangeable value (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2013). Childcare, for instance, is naturalized as a woman's duty, forcing many women to withdraw from paid employment, while men's economic participation remains unquestioned (Ecevit, 1998).

Patriarchy and capitalism jointly naturalize and devalue women's labor by framing it as biological rather than social, blurring the distinction between work and care, and denying its recognition as labor (Dedeoğlu, 2010). Although similar tasks are waged in the public sphere, their unpaid performance at home reinforces women's dependency. The private-public division further legitimizes gender roles, positioning men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, a pattern reproduced across generations (Dedeoğlu & Yakut-Çakar, 2010).

In Turkey, empirical studies confirm that women remain primarily responsible for domestic work despite increasing participation in the labor market. This double burden sustains structural inequalities: globally, women perform two-thirds of total working hours but receive only a fraction of income (Ecevit, 2011). Yet, access to paid employment often redefines women's identities within the household, enhancing their recognition and agency (Çınar & Köse, 2018).

Thus, the invisibility of women's labor is not merely a cultural or ideological issue but a structural mechanism that perpetuates patriarchal order and gendered poverty. Women's unpaid contributions remain indispensable to both family and economy, yet they are systematically marginalized and undervalued.

In Turkey, as in most countries of the world, the women in traditional families prefer or are forced to stay at home and do house chores, rather than making a career and working for a full-time or part-time job for a wage. This situation is more than a free individual choice, it is a situation related to the establishment of a patriarchal society and a cultural practice.

In Turkey, 61.3 percent of women who are not employed are housewives (TÜİK, 2012). Since the house chores done by those women is not subject to a wage, their efforts are either not visible at all or are taken into consideration at the minimal level. Women's confinement to home has been culturally and traditionally legitimized. According to this cultural acceptance, it is the man who will work in a paid job, and the woman is only responsible for doing house chores through the wage earned by the man (Acar Savran, 2012; Karakaya, 2018; Gerşil, 2015; Güneş, 2011). According to the TÜİK data, men in Turkey spend an average of 51 minutes on family affairs; this amount of time reaches 4 hours and 17 minutes for women (TÜİK, 2016). Women spend four or even five times more effort on house chores than men, but this does not have a monetary reward and is not valued for this very reason. This situation may even get worse in families with only minimum wage earnings. In this study, in the following sections we will try to reveal how women in families in Trabzon are affected by the disadvantages of the limited budget by the use of the data collected for the purposes of the current research. It is thought that the data can be gradually extended to the rest of the region and the country and will be certainly informative for people studying the subject matter.

In the relevant literature, women's financial problems within the family have been discussed not in terms of the minimum wage, but mostly in terms of poverty as a general concept (See Demirer et al., 2017; Dama, 2017; Şener, 2009; Uğur, 2017; Karakaya, 2018; Cömertler, 2004). However, the individuals living in households may go through different impoverishment processes. Individuals with different statuses within the household encounter insufficient income, financial difficulties and household responsibilities in various ways (Yılmaz, 2012). In this sense, it is clear that women are the family members who are affected the most by low-income levels. In fact, it is known that this situation manifests itself differently for women at different income levels. As we know from our general observations and experiences, we have in our daily lives, we may argue that in well-to-do families, it is mostly women who make use of the wealth, and in poor families, it is mostly women who experience the poverty. We may argue that this study is significantly different so that it examines women's problems by concretely relating the subject matter to the low-income families within the context of minimum wage.

Despite the modernization processes in Turkey over the last century, women continue to hold a disadvantaged position in both social and familial contexts. They bear

a heavier load in managing family affairs, assume more responsibilities, and have less access to daily life opportunities, particularly in low-income families, including those relying on minimum wage (Çakır, 2002).

In families with minimum wage income, women are more significantly affected by poverty. They are often excluded from decision-making within the family, leading to social marginalization (Çakır, 2002). As the proverb “The face of the poor is cold” suggests, men, by working outside the home, are seen as fulfilling their societal duties. However, the limited income available to women is insufficient to cover basic needs like food, education, healthcare, or social activities. This financial strain leads to the erosion of women’s social lives and exacerbates their sense of exclusion (Kayalar, 2019; Öztürk & Çetin, 2009).

Such persistent economic and social hardships result in physical, mental, and psychological health problems for women in low-income households (Alptekin, 2014; Yanikkerem et al., 2007). These challenges form a vicious cycle, trapping women in a web of isolation and victimization within both the family and society.

## **5 MINIMUM WAGE AND HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY**

The minimum wage is defined as the lowest wage that can be legally paid to an employee on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, intended to cover essential living expenses (Kurtcebe & Horzum, 2017). It is designed to meet the basic needs of an individual, yet it is generally considered an exceptional wage method rather than a standard one. According to the Minimum Wage Regulation (Article 4), the minimum wage is intended to support a single worker, not a family or couple. Moreover, the share of the minimum wage in total employment should ideally decrease over time within a country, though this principle is often overlooked in practice.

Household Economics, as a discipline, is concerned with providing women with both theoretical and practical knowledge to ensure the well-being of the household. It encompasses the management of income and expenditure, production and consumption processes, and the day-to-day aspects of life such as food, clothing, and shelter (Güngen, Tokyürek & Şanlı, 2002). This study focuses on exploring the economic experiences of women in households relying solely on minimum wage income.

## **6 RESEARCH PROBLEM, HYPOTHESIS AND STUDY OBJECTIVE**

The traditional patriarchal perspective in both the world and Turkey often places the responsibility for household chores and family-related issues on women. This gendered division of labor expects women to manage domestic tasks, childcare, elder care, and kitchen duties, while men are primarily seen as responsible for external work. As a result, women frequently bear the full burden of household responsibilities. The traditional view of women as “housewives” or “homemakers” leads to their economic dependence on men, leaving them with minimal personal spending power and forcing them to rely on their husbands for financial approval. This dependence is further exacerbated by limited family budgets and the failure to consider women’s individual needs. Women’s unpaid domestic labor remains undervalued, contributing to a range of personal, emotional, and social challenges. These issues are particularly pronounced in families living on a minimum wage, where financial constraints are severe.

This study aims to explore the difficulties faced by women in low-income families relying on minimum wage earnings. The hypothesis suggests that societal norms lead to a gendered perception of low income, with women being more negatively impacted by minimum wage constraints than men. The goal is to raise awareness about the struggles of these women and contribute to broader social understanding through the publication of the study’s findings.

## **7 STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION APPROACH**

This study utilized a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Creswell (2017), mixed-method research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data through both qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore a research problem from multiple perspectives.

The research population consists of women in families with minimum wage earnings in Trabzon. The sample includes 100 women from 100 families within this population, with a margin of error of 5%, representing approximately 43% of minimum wage workers in Trabzon, based on TÜİK data. Random sampling was used to select participants. Among the 100 participants, 30 individuals, who were more talkative and engaged, were chosen for interviews. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some surveys were

conducted in person, while others were conducted via phone. Telephone interviews proved more effective, as participants felt more comfortable and provided more detailed responses without the pressure of face-to-face interactions.

## **8 RESEARCH FIELD AND FINDINGS**

### **8.1 The experiences on minimum wage of housewives in an anatolian city**

According to TÜİK (2020) data, approximately 50% of families in Trabzon, similar to the national average in Turkey, live on minimum wage, which reflects a subsistence-level income. Trabzon ranks as the twelfth most expensive city in Turkey, with high living costs primarily due to its reliance on imported goods, including food, as the region lacks sufficient agricultural production (TÜİK, 2017). This increases the cost of living, making it particularly challenging for minimum wage earners, especially women, to make ends meet. While men often accept these hardships as a given, women face them daily.

The research focused on neighborhoods in Trabzon, including Erdoğdu No. 1, Erdoğdu No. 2, Atapark, Yeni Cuma, and Ortamahalle, where many households live on minimum wage. These areas primarily feature rental apartments, with women typically responsible for household chores. In Akçaabat, although more families own their homes, these properties often lack basic amenities such as plastering, insulation, or elevators. Homeowners reported slightly better living conditions, but still shared similar challenges, particularly in managing household duties.

The findings suggest that for women living on minimum wage in Trabzon, survival rather than quality of life is the primary concern. These women focus more on maintaining the household and raising children under difficult financial constraints, rather than providing formal education or improving their standard of living.

### **8.2 Demographic findings**

When we look at the age range of the participants in families with only minimum wage earnings, we understood that there were 7 people in the age range of 18-25, 18 in the age range of 26-33, 32 in the age range of 34-41 and finally 43 people in the age range

of 42 and above. The low number of participants in the youngest age group can be considered as an indication that the Turkish women no longer prefer to live depending on the income of a minimum wage earner spouse. The high number of persons in the oldest group confirms this inference.

**Table 1**

*Your educational status?*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Illiterate	9	9,0
Primary School	40	40,0
Middle School	19	19,0
High School	27	27,0
Bachelor's Degree	5	5,0
Total	100	100,0

The educational status of the participants revealed that 9% were illiterate, which is higher than the Turkish average of 7.6% (TÜİK, 2019). This discrepancy is likely linked to income levels rather than regional factors. Among participants aged 40 and above, many expressed regret over not receiving an education, stating desires such as “I wanted to study” or “I wanted to get an education.” According to TÜİK (2019), 40.4% of families have a higher educational level for the male member, while 15.1% have a higher educational level for the female, and 42.9% have the same educational level. Notably, the percentage of families with a higher educational level for women has increased in younger age groups, particularly in families where individuals aged 25-29 are involved, reflecting a shift in attitudes towards women’s education as modernization progresses.

Research in Turkey indicates that people now place greater importance on education and financial status when choosing a partner (Yapıcı, 2010). Higher education also often leads to increased participation in the workforce, which results in dual incomes for the household. Many participants with lower educational levels expressed regret, stating that if they had studied, they would have contributed to the household income and provided better opportunities for their children. Illiterate participants emphasized the importance of basic education, stating that it is essential for daily life and accessing services, such as finding their way in a hospital.

Regarding family size, the study found that 5% of families had no children, 11% had one child, 37% had two children, 31% had three children, 12% had four children, and

4% had five or six children. Families with three or more children comprised 47% of the sample. The presence of multiple children significantly increased financial and caregiving burdens, particularly for women. In terms of household size, 62% of families had four or fewer members, while 38% had five or more, with some families having as many as eight members. In 34% of families with four or fewer children, extended family members also lived in the household, further complicating the financial and caregiving challenges faced by these women.

### 8.3 Making a living for families with only minimum wage earnings

**Table 2**

**My husband cannot leave me enough money for my domestic needs!**

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	28	28,0
I agree	23	23,0
Partially agree	30	30,0
Disagree	17	17,0
Absolutely disagree	2	2,0
Total	100	100,0

The table above indicates that 81% of participants agreed with the statement, “My husband cannot leave me enough money for domestic needs,” while only 19% disagreed. The negative respondents generally believed that the minimum wage earned by men was insufficient, with some stating, “If he had money, he would quit; he is working for the home, what else can he do?” Among the 19% who responded negatively, 10 received financial assistance from their families, 11 had one or two children, 5 took on additional jobs, 8 made food items at home instead of purchasing them, and 2 received financial aid from the government. These coping strategies may have softened their grievances, leading them to rationalize the situation rather than openly complain.

Literature supports the idea that minimum wage families often struggle to allocate sufficient funds for food. For instance, in Kocakahya's (2007) study, 9% of respondents reported being unable to afford certain food items like red meat, while 84.1% of minimum wage earners acknowledged suffering health issues due to poor nutrition.

**Table 3**

*As a woman, I am forced to dedicate most of my time to household chores!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	71	71,0
I agree	18	18,0
Partially Agree	5	5,0
Disagree	5	5,0
Absolutely disagree	1	1,0
Total	100	100

Another proposition in our survey is: “As a woman, I have to spend most of my time on housework!” The responses to this proposition, with the options “I completely agree,” “I agree,” and “I somewhat agree,” totaled 94%, indicating a strong positive response. The situation that explains this intensity can be associated with the traditional roles where men are detached from housework as the breadwinners, while women are identified with the home and family, and even asking for help in this regard is often discouraged. The primary duties of women are reflected as responsibilities that ensure the continuity of the household, such as child-rearing, cooking, and cleaning. This mentality is taught to girls and is perpetuated as a habit, which ultimately gets passed down from generation to generation. The traces of the patriarchal family structure can be observed here. In fact, research points to this as well. According to these studies, women sometimes work as heavy laborers in the home. These heavy and intense working conditions can sometimes overwhelm them, even leading them to the brink of exhaustion. They may even regret getting married or having children (Arikan, 2002). This topic has also been addressed in the interviews conducted in our study. Some of the participants expressed the following: K12: “I haven’t lived my life properly. I came blind, I’ll leave blind. I’ve never been able to live my life.” K18: “Before I got married, I did most of the things that men do, I thought I would have an easier life if I got married, I knew I was a woman, but it didn’t turn out that way, I had to make even more sacrifices.” On the other hand, 6% of the responses were negative. Among those who responded negatively, 5% stated that they worked extra jobs due to economic inadequacies. From this observation, it is clear that women who work at home do not have private time for themselves, and they are unable to socialize. However, those who take on extra jobs see it as an opportunity to go outside, as a change of air, or even as a blessing.

**Table 4**

*We can't make ends meet because my husband works for minimum wage!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	46	46,0
I agree	26	26,0
Partially Agree	19	19,0
Disagree	7	7,0
Absolutely disagree	2	2,0
Total	100	100,0

As seen in the table above, the 91% positive response to the proposition of “We cannot make ends meet because my husband works for the minimum wage!” clearly emphasizes that only one minimum wage was insufficient for a family to survive. These answers reveal that almost every minimum wage family has difficulty making ends meet. As the research reveals, nutrition and other basic needs, which are the bases for determining the minimum wage, are determined according to the most economical prices in the market. For this reason, the minimum wage is insufficient in many markets (Kutal, 2011).

On the other hand, the percentage of the responses of “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” provided for this proposition is 9%. We found out that among those participants, 2 of them received monetary assistance from their families, 7 of them had 2 or 1 child, 1 of them received monetary assistance from the government, and among them there were participants who were homeowners, although they inherited their homes. We concluded that the participants were able to make a living with the minimum wage due to the mentioned factors. In addition to all these concrete situations, it should be taken into consideration that the conservative tendencies may also come into play and the participants may adopt a protective mode with conservative reflexes. When all these factors are evaluated together, we may say that no family receiving minimum wage can actually meet its needs, but only struggles to meet them. If these families manage to make ends meet with of the minimum wage, it is clear that this is managed by women in those families.

In the interviews conducted within the scope of the research, the participants who were asked the following questions stated that they were unable to make ends meet with the minimum wage: “What is it like to be a woman in a minimum wage family?” When you compare yourself to families with higher incomes, what kind of differences, what kind of disadvantages and what kind of additional burdens do you have from the women

of those families? How do you explain? The participants made the following statements: P2: “Of course, you have a hard time trying to make ends meet on minimum wage. I cannot buy what I want. You want to buy many things, but it is not possible.” P4: “Living on minimum wage is a difficult situation. I think families with higher incomes are more comfortable, and they don’t have any problems. Sometimes we cannot even spare money for health. But they don’t have such a problem.” P5: “We thank God. But I couldn’t afford my children’s education after high school, they were smart. But they got married. Families with higher income can educate their children.” P16: “We are barely making it until the end of the month.” P22: “Making a living is very difficult, we cannot tell you. Children are now getting distant education, there are no computers or tablets, so they are left behind in their education.” P23: “Making a living is very difficult. When you don’t have enough money, you can’t do anything you want. I have to work because the children have grown up, otherwise how can I leave the house? You only have to look after the children and by the time you eat and clean the dishes, the evening comes. Now I have to work. We borrowed money from our relatives to buy a house. The house we lived in belonged to my father. When he told us to leave, we had to buy a house.” P28: “If your house is a rental apartment, everything is difficult; I have to do extra work. We couldn’t afford to pay our debts.” As it may be seen, in different ways most of the participants expressed the difficulty of making a living, but the common denominator is that it is difficult to make ends meet. Indeed, in her article titled “Minimum is not a living wage,” Robbyn (1988) discusses that the minimum wage is not sufficient to live on and explains this within the framework of the data she used.

### Table 5

*In my opinion, the addressee of the proverb “Poverty is the Shirt of Nessus” is mostly women!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	23	23,0
I agree	28	28,0
Partially Agree	15	15,0
Disagree	27	27,0
Absolutely disagree	7	7,0
Total	100	100,0

Sixty-six percent of participants agreed with the statement, “In my opinion, the addressee of the proverb ‘Poverty is a shirt of fire’ is mostly women,” indicating that

women are more severely impacted by poverty's disadvantages. Gender roles, which assign more responsibilities to women, exacerbate their challenges, though the effects differ between high- and low-income families.

Women tend to experience and evaluate both poverty and wealth more deeply than men. As one participant stated, "I envy those with high incomes... my resources are always inadequate, while they can use their wealth for their needs." Conversely, 34% of participants disagreed with the statement. Those who responded negatively often did not pay rent and received financial assistance from families or the government, with fewer children or household members. This suggests that conservative values and less economic strain may explain why a third of responses were negative.

**Table 6**

All Responsibilities Within the Household Fall on My Shoulders!

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	36	36,0
I agree	15	15,0
Partially Agree	15	15,0
Disagree	32	32,0
Absolutely disagree	2	2,0
Total	100	100,0

As seen in the table above, 66% of respondents gave a positive answer to the proposition, while 34% gave a negative answer. The high percentage of 66% for the positive response indicates that most or all of the household chores fall on the shoulders of women. The 2% of participants who answered "Strongly disagree" still exclude household chores and other labor-intensive tasks from their responsibilities. These tasks, traditionally considered the primary duties of women, appear to have been internalized by some of the women as well.

During the interviews, participants made statements supporting their agreement with this proposition, such as the following: K10: "I have to stretch my feet according to my blanket. I put less meat in the food. For example, I always take care of my relatives, and I look after them too. If my income were higher, these things wouldn't happen." As seen, even though there is a male breadwinner in the household, it is considered the woman's responsibility to use the household income in the most efficient way. Additionally, women take on all the responsibilities that ensure the continuity of the home, such as housework, and caring for the sick and children. Moreover, women believe

that these tasks should also be shared by men, or at least that they should be assisted by them. This belief can be seen in the following statement from a participant: K6: “If necessary, my husband should take care of the child while I work. These things should happen. But they look at it as if it’s something strange.”

#### 8.4 Coping strategies of housewives under minimum wage constraints

**Table 7**

*I Have to Produce Some Items at Home Instead of Buying them from the Market!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely I agree	18	18,0
I agree	31	31,0
Partially agree	13	13,0
Disagree	17	17,0
Absolutely disagree	21	21,0
Total	100	100,0

Sixty-two percent of participants agreed with the statement, “I have to produce some items at home instead of buying them from the market,” reflecting the societal expectation that women take responsibility for these tasks. In their social circles, women often discuss matters such as preparing for winter and drying peppers, reinforcing the perception of these duties as essential. This internalization of responsibilities is a significant factor, as women perceive these tasks as part of their primary duties.

Kocakahya’s (2007) study found that food items most commonly prepared at home by minimum wage families included pickles (96%), canned goods (83.7%), and tomato paste (79.7%), while freezing vegetables and drying were less common (30.1% and 29%, respectively). Similarly, Çiçek et al. (2005) found that low-income housewives often prepared pickles (87.5%), jam (83.3%), and tomato paste (74.3%).

One participant, P20, explained that economic difficulties made it rare for her to visit the market, stating, “When I have money, I go to the market, but this is very rare.” As a result, producing food at home becomes a necessity. While such practices are more feasible in rural areas, they pose significant challenges for women in urban settings, where they are time-consuming and physically demanding.

**Table 8**

*I Have to Do My Grocery Shopping at the Farmers Market During the Discount Hours in the Evening!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Destroyed	6	6,0
Absolutely agree	25	25,0
I agree	22	22,0
Partially agree	15	15,0
Disagree	16	16,0
Absolutely disagree	16	16,0
Total	100	100,0

Missing data was notably high in response to the survey statement, “I have to do my grocery shopping at the farmers market during the discount hours in the evening,” with six participants indicating they did not visit the market. The primary reason for this was the lack of sufficient funds, as illustrated by P1’s statement, “I can’t go to the market, I don’t have enough money.” In contrast, 53% of participants reported shopping at the market during discount hours, reflecting the inadequacy of the minimum wage to cover family expenses.

Studies indicate that low-income families often prefer supermarkets for their perceived affordability and quality (Roux et al., 1999, as cited in Kocakahya, 2007). However, in Turkey, most minimum wage families shop at small or medium-sized stores, often relying on credit, as they lack the cash to pay upfront. These families typically repay their debts once they receive their salary, underscoring the economic constraints they face. The fact that women predominantly manage these financial challenges highlights the additional burdens they carry in minimum wage households.

**Table 9**

*Sometimes I Have to Get Products That Are Out of Sale in the Market!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
No Answer	6	6,0
Absolutely agree	11	11,0
I agree	3	3,0
Partially agree	2	2,0
Disagree	35	35,0
Absolutely disagree	43	43,0
Total	100	100,0

6 participants did not respond to the proposition of “Sometimes I have to get products that are not on sale in the market” (those products are ready to be discarded and are usually given free of charge before being finally discarded), they ignored it and we observed that most of the remaining participants were ashamed, bored, hesitant and embarrassed while responding to this proposition. While 78% of the participants responded negatively to this proposition; 16% openly responded positively, without feeling the need to hide it. Despite the humiliation of picking fruit and vegetables from the market that are thrown or partially rotten on the ground, 16 participants openly stated this. Two of these participants explained the issue as follows in the interviews; P2: “I am not ashamed of this, I buy off-sale products rather than leave my children hungry. What should we do? Should my children go hungry?” P3 said, “I don't have enough money, I have to buy products that are out of sale in the evening.” If it is estimated that the 6 people who did not answer this proposition and ignored it had to resort to this method at least from time to time, we may argue that the percentage of minimum wage female family members who get partially rotten and bruised products in the market will increase to 22%. One of the participants who responded negatively to this proposition (P4) expressed the undesirable aspect and difficulty of this situation with the following words in the interview: “I have not fallen that far yet”, whereas almost a quarter of the women who are members of minimum wage families have pointed out that they have resorted to this method and expressed the difficult situation that they have fallen into.

**Table 10**

*I Have to Get Help from Government Institutions!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	6	6,0
I agree	11	11,0
Partially agree	7	7,0
Disagree	39	39,0
Absolutely disagree	37	37,0
Total	100	100,0

The percentage of participants who responded positively to the statement, “I have to get help from government institutions!” was 24%, slightly above the national average. However, this figure may be underestimated, as some recipients of government aid may be reluctant to disclose this. For minimum wage families, this percentage seems particularly low, given that many families rely more heavily on support from family,

relatives, or neighbors. In interviews, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficiency of government aid, such as one participant (P20) who stated, “I received help from the district governorship once, it was around 400 liras. In this day and age, who would expect 400 liras to be enough for us?”

Those who do not receive government aid often resort to family or community support, accepting alms, charity, or zakat (mandatory Islamic alms). This dependency places these individuals in a disadvantaged position, diminishing their social prestige and gradually excluding them from decision-making processes within their neighborhoods. Importantly, this social exclusion is more pronounced for women, who, due to gender dynamics, may face additional humiliation and marginalization. While men in minimum wage households may face economic hardship, it is women who are more likely to experience both economic and social subordination, reinforcing sexist exclusion. It has already been argued in various studies that poverty leads to greater social exclusion for women compared to men (Najam-us-Saqib & Arif).

**Table 11**

*As a woman, I am forced to meet these needs in various ways!*

	Frequency	Percentage %
Absolutely agree	17	17,0
I agree	25	25,0
Partially agree	24	24,0
Disagree	29	29,0
Absolutely disagree	5	5,0
Total	100	100,0

The responses to the proposition seen in the table above are consistent with the other tables, the hypothesis of the study, and the general findings. As shown in this table, the total percentage of respondents who answered “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” and “Somewhat agree” to the proposition “As a woman, I am forced to meet these needs in various ways!” is 66%, which is nearly twice the total percentage of those who answered “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree” at 34%. This difference reflects the attribution of all household responsibilities to women. Based on these results, it can be said that women are struggling alone to meet the needs within the household. Among the 34% of participants who gave a negative response to this proposition, 26% were found to receive assistance from the government, their families, or were able to produce due to having a garden at home, which may explain their negative responses. Only 8% of this group

remains, and if we consider their social profile, which is likely to be conservative (Ertit, 2019), it can be inferred that they may have hesitated to give a positive response to such questions due to religious sentiments and traditional thinking, as responding positively could be seen as a rebellion against religion, the state, and other sacred entities. In other words, conservative tendencies can very well lead to overlooking worldly and material realities and accepting them with resignation.

## 9 CONCLUSION

The minimum wage, ideally intended to cover only the essential needs of an individual, has become the primary income for many families, particularly in Turkey, where it is disproportionately applied. This widespread reliance on the minimum wage has led to the normalization of poverty, making it more ingrained in certain social segments. While poverty may be reduced in the short term, addressing the cultural aspects of poverty requires much longer efforts.

In households dependent on a single minimum wage, economic difficulties are exacerbated, particularly as family size increases. This burden is most acutely felt by women, who are disproportionately affected by poverty. Women in minimum wage households consistently reported the inadequacy of their earnings, citing challenges in covering basic expenses such as food and children's education. However, the social implications for women are perhaps more significant than the economic ones. Women in such families face isolation, exclusion from social activities, and marginalization from decision-making processes, leading to social alienation. As the number of minimum wage families grows, so too does the number of women affected by these challenges, making it a pressing social issue.

Despite the common perception of Black Sea women as strong and resilient, this stereotype often leads to the neglect of their socio-economic struggles. Women in this region, like others, have significant economic and social needs that must be addressed. Their strength should not excuse the disregard for their issues, particularly when it comes to child-rearing. For children to thrive, a minimum level of financial security is essential. Although financial means are not the sole requirement for proper child development, their absence severely limits the opportunities available to children in minimum wage households.

The situation of women in minimum wage families is particularly fragile, as they bear the responsibility of child-rearing in a context of financial insecurity. Since child-rearing is predominantly viewed as a woman's responsibility, the lack of financial resources falls squarely on their shoulders, compounding their burdens. This issue deserves attention from both societal and institutional levels to ensure that children in these households can develop in a healthy, supportive environment.

In social life, women often bear the dual burdens of wealth and poverty. While wealth can be displayed as a personal choice, poverty is an imposed and often inescapable reality for many women. Women are key figures in both socio-economic extremes, experiencing poverty not by choice but due to systemic inequalities. As this issue increasingly impacts women across the country, it is critical that both public and institutional efforts address the root causes and rehabilitate this cultural cycle of poverty.

This study contributes to feminist political economy by demonstrating how the feminization of poverty is reproduced within households that rely solely on minimum wage income. The findings reveal that women are not only economically disadvantaged but also socially marginalized through mechanisms of patriarchy and invisible labor. While women's contributions to household survival are critical, their efforts remain undervalued and obscured, reinforcing their subordinate position within both the family and society at large. In this sense, the study underscores how macroeconomic policies, such as reliance on minimum wage labor, intersect with patriarchal norms to perpetuate gendered inequalities.

Moreover, the research highlights the theoretical significance of linking women's unpaid domestic work to broader structures of economic dependency. By situating women at the center of household resilience under financial precarity, the findings reaffirm that gender inequality is embedded not only in the labor market but also in the very social reproduction processes that sustain economic life. Thus, the study advances debates on the intersection of patriarchy, invisible labor, and the feminization of poverty, showing that women's struggles in minimum wage households are both a socio-economic and a deeply structural issue requiring transformative policy interventions.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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